

Chinese Citizens' Historic Petitions

Villagers Across China Petition for Release of Falun Gong Practitioners

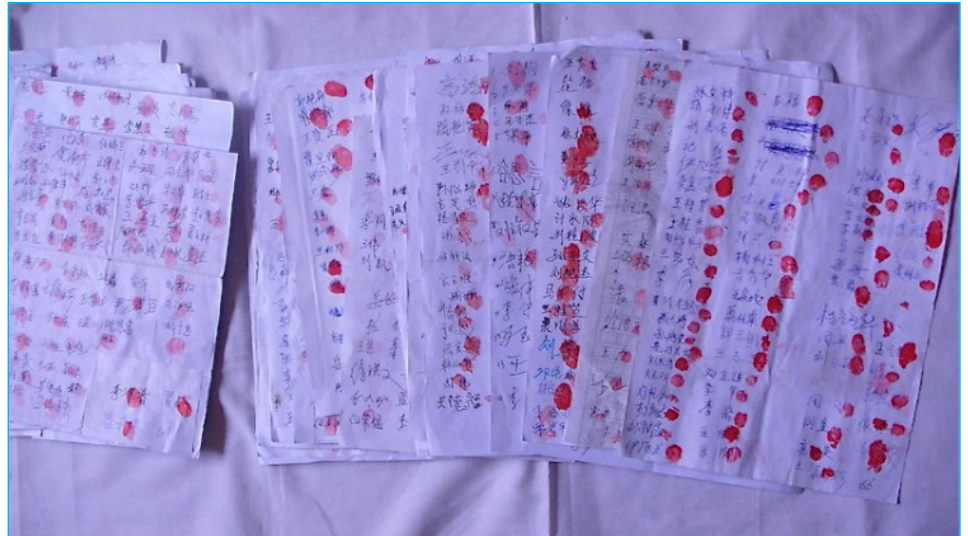
AFTER THE COMMUNIST PARTY launched a brutal and systematic campaign against Falun Gong in 1999, many Chinese people feared speaking out against the abductions, torture, and killing taking place around them, even though they felt Falun Gong practitioners were good people being wrongfully persecuted. To do so would most likely have brought the same persecution to themselves.

Now this is changing.

A growing number of ordinary Chinese citizens are signing their names to petitions calling on the authorities to release a neighbor or friend imprisoned for practicing Falun Gong or otherwise redress an injustice against him. The Falun Dafa Information Center is aware of at least 20 such petitions initiated over the past three years. Since 2011, the phenomenon has been gaining remarkable momentum, despite the obvious risks of publicly criticizing the Communist Party.

Such public advocacy for Falun Gong comes on the heels of 13 years of practitioners persistently using creative, courageous, and peaceful ways to counter the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda against them and explain to fellow Chinese the reality of the persecution.

In recent years, a growing contingent of human rights lawyers have defended Falun Gong practitioners in court or



A petition from Heilongjiang Province signed and thumb-printed by 15,000 Chinese calls for justice over the death in custody of a Falun Gong practitioner

through open letters to top officials, but most other Chinese have remained silent. As more people come to see how the persecution threatens their own freedoms, they, too, are speaking out against the injustices.

As evident from the wording on the petitions themselves, central to the villagers' appeal is the fact that the Falun Gong practitioners arrested were known as kind, generous members of the community.

Also notable is how many people have signed with their real names, as well as thumbprints in red ink or wax, a practice that was historically used to make legal documents official. Thumbprints in red were notably used by 18 villagers in 1978 to secretly break up their commune-owned farmland into private lots, the ultimate taboo after decades of Maoist policies. But in that year, Deng Xiaoping began implementing massive economic reforms, including further allocation of land for private farming, which would usher in dramatic chang-

“Mr. Liu has been cultivating himself to be a moral person by following Falun Gong’s principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance... he has always thought about others first. It is well-known that he is a good person. The villagers hope that officials from the Jilin City Government will help get Mr. Liu released.”

— Excerpt from a petition signed by dozens of villagers calling on the Jilin city government to release 59-year-old Mr. Liu Zhichen

es over the next three decades. Today, the contract of the 18 villagers sits in the National Museum of China and is regarded as a document that helped change the course of history.

The historic significance of petitions with red thumbprints is not lost on Communist Party leaders. In May 2012, reports surfaced that a petition for a Falun Gong practitioner with 300 signatures and thumbprints had been circulated among top-level officials. The petition, one source revealed, had stirred fierce debate at the highest levels of the Party with some officials advocating a peaceful end to the Falun Gong persecution campaign waged by the regime since 1999.

The following are three recent examples of such petitions.

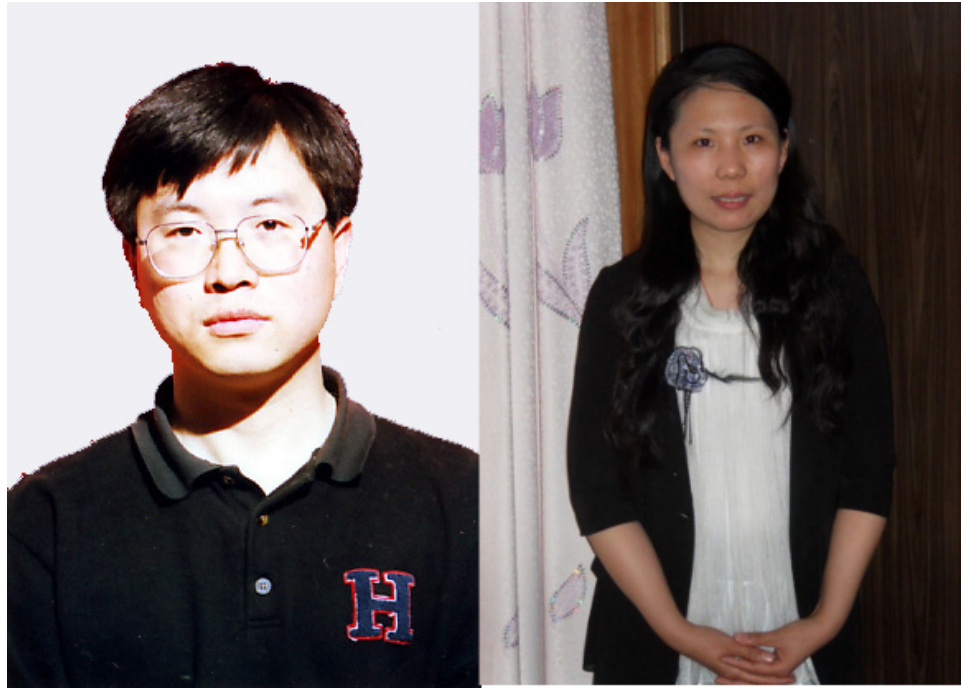
June 2011 - Jilin Province

On June 17, 2011, dozens of villagers signed a petition to the government of Jilin City urging the release of fellow villager, 59-year-old Mr. Liu Zhichen, who had been detained for practicing Falun Gong.

“It is well-known that he [Mr. Liu] is a good person. He has been helping his fellow villagers all of these years...,” says the petition. “The villagers hope that officials from the Jilin City government will help get Mr. Liu released.”

“In a gesture that’s rarely seen in China, thousands of ordinary people have dared to publicly show their support for individuals unfairly imprisoned and tortured in detention. This shows that the Chinese public is aware of and condemns persecution of people for their spiritual beliefs. It’s high time that the Chinese authorities heed this call and end their brutal suppression of the Falun Gong group.”

— Catherine Baber,
Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Asia



Over 2,000 people signed a petition calling for the release of Zhou Xiangyang (left); his wife Li Shanshan (right) was sent to a labor camp for helping collect the signatures

August 2011 - Hebei Province

On August 12, 2011, over 1,500 people in Qinhuangdao signed a petition titled “How Will You Treat This Public Opinion.” It calls on the authorities to release Mr. Zhou Xiangyang, a 38-year-old Falun Gong practitioner being held at Binhai Prison in Tianjin and reportedly in poor health due to torture.

“We look forward to seeing that Zhou Xiangyang is released, and that those who applied the ‘floor anchor’ torture in Gangbei Prison are investigated and dealt with according to law,” says the

petition.

According to Amnesty International, as news of the appeal spread, more people signed onto the original petition for Zhou, with the total reaching over 2,300 signatures.

June 2012 - Heilongjiang Province

In May and June 2012, at least 15,000 people in northeast China signed a petition (photo on front) voicing support for a young woman’s demand that Chinese authorities investigate the death of her father, Qin Yueming, a well-known Falun Gong practitioner who was killed at Jiamusi Prison in February 2011.

“As a [young] girl I do not have money nor do I have power,” wrote 23-year-old Qin Rongqian in her petition asking others to support her appeal. “But I believe in justice and the Chinese people’s moral values. How can those who have power jail and murder ordinary people at will?”